

AN OLD SCOTCH LIBERAL ON HOME RULE.

To the Members of the EDINBURGH LIBERAL ASSOCIATION.

GENTLEMEN,—A few weeks ago you did me the honour of electing me honorary president of your Association on the understanding that I should not be called upon to do any work. Being a very old resident in the district, I accepted the honour in the spirit in which it was tendered.

I observe from the *Scotsman* of the 14th that the Association met and passed certain resolutions embodying principles to which I have always been opposed, and which compel me to restore into your hands, which I hereby do, the honour you so recently conferred upon me. I need only refer to the first two sub-sections of your resolution. The first expresses great admiration of Mr. Gladstone's talents and sagacity, and refers to his unequalled experience as a Parliamentary leader. To this extent I cordially agree with the resolution. When I had the honour of being Lord Provost of your city I had great satisfaction, 33 years ago, in proposing that the freedom of the city should be conferred on **Mr. Gladstone**. I greatly admired him then, I venerate him now, as one of the greatest and most patriotic Ministers this country has ever produced. **But he never professed to be infallible.** He has always laid down his plans for the consideration of the people, and rested his support of them in Parliament on the grounds that he believed they had the approval of the great body of the people. **He has now brought forward a Bill for establishing a Parliament in Ireland,** and removing the present Irish members from the Parliament at Westminster, and it is as regards this Bill that I am utterly opposed to the resolution passed by a majority of your Association; and I believe the great majority of the inhabitants, if tested, would be found to be against you, for during the sixteen years I represented you in Parliament, I always voted against Mr. Butt's Bill for an Irish Parliament, and was never reproved for this. **You describe the Bill to be—“To set up in Dublin a Parliament chosen by the Irish people for the control of Irish domestic affairs.”** It seems to me to go greatly beyond this, if we may judge from Mr. Gladstone's speech as to the Bill itself; and thus, judging for myself alone, **I am bound to say that I consider it by far the most reckless and dangerous measure ever proposed within my experience,** and my experience is rather a long one; for I was present at the first great Reform meeting held in Scotland in 1820, usually called the Pantheon meeting, from the place where it was held,

and at which the great Whig leaders of the Scottish bar were the chief speakers.

It was implied by the speakers at your meeting that the Bill might be so improved in committee as to be made harmless to the other portions of the United Kingdom. I doubt the possibility of this. **The principle of the Bill is radically unsound in my opinion**, but if the principle be admitted, I think the clauses and details flowing therefrom, as now embodied in the Bill, are quite logical and symmetrical. One strong objection against the Bill in many quarters is the exclusion of the Irish members from the Parliament at Westminster, and in this I participate. **I altogether disagree with the theory on which the Bill is based**; but, if we admit the theory of a separate Parliament in Dublin to be right, it seems to me that the exclusion of the Irish members from Westminster is inevitable—it is a logical sequence. If any number of Irish members were to be sent to Westminster after the establishment of their own Parliament in Dublin, with substantially the powers conferred by the Bill, **it seems to me that it would be to admit that the Irish were a superior race to the English and Scotch**, and, therefore, besides allowing them to manage their own affairs, they were to send a contingent to our Parliament to assist us in managing our affairs also; and bad as the Bill now is, such an arrangement would make it still worse. **The remedy is like the Highlandman's gun which required a new stock, lock, and barrel.** It is not desirable that Mr. Gladstone should be humiliated by the defeat of the Bill, after spending the best part of the session in discussing it, and preventing the progress of other useful measures. **The Bill should be withdrawn**, and some of the wisest heads in the three kingdoms, without regard to party, ought to be employed in devising a measure of Home Rule which would apply equally to each of the three kingdoms, and have a tendency to unite them more and more in one friendly bond of brotherhood in place of separating them into distinct nationalities. **If an election were to take place at an early period**, I hope it will be put on this distinct ground—Should there be a Parliament in Dublin or not? If in our district a candidate comes forward for an Irish Parliament and another against it, if I should be spared in health and strength, **I should vote for the candidate against the Irish Parliament whatever his other political opinions might be, whether Radical, Whig, or Tory**, so strong is my conviction of the ulterior evil consequences which would flow from such a measure. I am, Gentlemen, yours faithfully,

NEWINGTON HOUSE,
16th April, 1886.

DUNCAN M'LAREN.